



Four ●●○○ *Quarters*

VOL. XXVII

NO. 3

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Four Quarters

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VOL. XXVII, No. 3

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Marginalia . . .

DEAR JOHN

As the Wordsworth of "Tintern Abbey" might have put it, seven years have passed, seven volumes, with the length of twenty-eight long issues since John Keenan became editor of Four Quarters. The present volume will be the last to appear under his editorship; next July he returns from a year-long research grant to begin his new duties as chairman of the English Department here at La Salle.

Concrete evidence of John's achievement as editor is abundantly available: for example, stories he has selected for Four Quarters have been frequently listed in Martha Foley's annual Best American Short Stories—three stories last year, and in some years nearly half of the stories he printed. Of the four books published in the distinguished Illinois Short Fiction Series in 1977, three were by Four Quarters authors.

But it is not the concrete evidence that needs emphasis. Nor is it simply the feat of sorting through some 20,000 stories and poems to pick the best 300. John did the job quietly and thoroughly, with grace and style and decency. He wrote encouraging notes to authors who just missed; he composed enthusiastic acceptance letters that no doubt now provide continuing literary fortification from many a writer's top drawer; he produced for each issue an elegant "Marginalia" that made us all furiously jealous of his style. In his spare time, John turned the scholarly typescripts of his suppliant colleagues into readable prose, placed his own poems in such places as AAUP Journal and Commonweal, and won the Lindback Award for Distinguished Teaching.

As editor of Four Quarters, John Keenan was willing to submerge his own considerable creative talents to let other talents speak. Three of our writers now want to speak about John and Four Quarters.

H. E. Francis of the University of Alabama at Huntsville, formerly editor of Poem and Fulbright lecturer in Argentina and England, won the Iowa Award for Short Fiction for his collection The Itinerary of Beggars. He recently achieved the distinction of having a story selected for the O. Henry collection, the Martha Foley collection, and the Pushcart Prize volume:

(continued on Page 35)

Uncle

CLAUDE KOCH

THERE IS no traffic sign commanding *Yield* where Main Street nudges into Thule Drive. The residents of Wallingford do not take to such imperatives. And if they did, the trees of Main, that obscure so many things, would shadow and splinter so democratic and authoritative a vision. Wallingford is not for levelers.

Yet now, in Autumn, the leaves did seem translucent, and as we eased into Thule and I pushed back Mother's mourning veil to see more clearly, I wondered if Wallace, too, were thinking how Uncle Clarence had collected and mounted leaf after leaf—with no skill at all but an abiding affection. All the while we moved at a decorous pace through Wallingford, Wallace had not spoken, but sat with that peculiar, removed tranquility that I have envied and loved—if only because it has been for me an eloquent gesture for a sense of timelessness that I have rarely had myself.

How appropriate it would be, I thought, if even now we yielded despite the mores of Wallingford. For a scruffy Volkswagen had the lead upon us, approaching up Thule under the Ginkgo trees as we edged with a stately elegance from Main. I am ashamed to admit that even under normal conditions I cannot keep quiet for long, so I said:

"Did you know that the Ginkgo is a living fossil? It is extinct in the wild state. Only the temple gardens of China preserved it from extinction."

Wallace understood. He touched my hand.

"It's all right, Fran," he said. "It's all right."

But I saw that he was watching the Volkswagen; and because he has the happy grace of seeing emblems everywhere, I knew that he was waiting for something. When it came he did not look at me, but lowered his head with that little smile that has nothing to do with humor, and the tremble of the lips that I josh him about so often:

("Only a fish does that.")

("But I *am* a Pisces. . . .")

So though the Volkswagen had the lead on us, it pulled toward the side of the road—not enough to suggest that it was being parked, but ceremonially. And the driver stopped. His bumper sticker read *I Brake for Children*, and I got a glimpse of him as we

drove by, his hand to a hat as battered as the pork-pies of my Father's youth, and the smoke from the hastily removed cigarette still swirling about a face melancholy and commonplace above an indifferent scarf. Then we passed on, and I said: "It's common name is Maidenhair-Tree, you know. I've always liked that—so did Uncle Clarence."

I could never bring myself to call him anything but Uncle Clarence, nor could Wallace, though neither of us would see forty again.

"We were talking—that is, Uncle Clarence and I were talking," I said, "about the tulips back on Main—the trees. Of course they're spectacular, but hardly for an urban street. We agreed on that."

"It's only a mile," Wallace said. "We'll be there soon."

"Yes, of course. Do you think the children are all right?" I made to turn, but Wallace stayed me again. "You're right, of course; they must learn too."

I had learned from Uncle Clarence. "Wallace, do you think there's someone for each phase of life? I still remember coming back from the University that first time; Uncle Clarence was actually . . . timid. Maybe I preened myself a bit. Do you think I did?" It was too cruel, to be caught up in so ingenuous a sin; then the burning, like salt blown in a bitter wind, began behind my eyes, and I gripped Mother's prayerbook for dear life. Wallace's hand came over mine, but I could not help it—my breath caught again and again, like the first frantic moment in water over one's head, gasping for an element to live in.

Of course the children were all right. It is foolish to call them children. Edmund, who was sitting with Grandma now in Uncle Clarence's old apartment before the blind television screen, is twenty-two. But it was because of Uncle Clarence—so vividly associated with my own childhood, perhaps, that as I thought of him we all came of an age: it would be about twelve; it would be about summer; and in the Pine Barrens the Curly-grass and the *Corema conradii* would be flourishing, and the elfin forest, that other awakening for a child.

"Grandma didn't understand," I said after a while. Then I did look back. There were only two cars in the cortege. I could see Denise and Larry and young Clarence in the car behind. They were curiously stiff, their upper bodies propped like figures in a mildly distressing dream. Two cars were enough; it was our pact with Uncle Clarence. The church had been modestly filled. I was not surprised, though there were no tears—rather an openness, a naturalness, as though everyone was for this moment at least his

unadorned self. Then I saw that the Volkswagen had joined us, keeping ceremonious pace at a decent interval. His lights, too, were on.

"I mean," I said, "she thought I was Mother. She called me Nikky. Mom's old nickname—I remember Father calling her that when I was a child. She thinks it's Uncle Lawrence or Uncle Denny who's died. She reliving it all again." Grandmother is ninety-six, and Uncle Clarence was the last of her children living. "Once she called Ed by your name.

"I told her we had a Latin Mass, and they sang *Panis Angelicus* and Gounod's *Ave Maria* because Uncle Clarence liked them. But she didn't understand. She kept telling me not to distress myself, that I had my own family to worry about now, and I must not leave Father alone with the new baby. It was as though I were hearing the news of my own birth . . ." That thought silenced me. The trees fled past.

"We must go to the Barrens again," Wallace said. "It will soon be spring."

"Yes . . . yes. Spring . . ." Still the trees dropped back with the regularity of years.

FATHER NEVER came back from Saipan, but he never got there either, because the landing craft he was in capsized on a coral reef offshore. I dreamed for days of choking under blue water, for I had heard what I was not meant to hear. And then Uncle Clarence, whose eyes behind his thick glasses were so big that they were all I saw of his face in those days, came into my life for real. With his glasses off he looked like Father, but then he bumped into walls and would think an elephant's limbs were the trunks of trees. He cared for Grandma even then—the two of them living on the edge of Wallingford in a three-room first-floor apartment, with the privileges of a back yard that he'd turned into a bricked city garden. And sometimes, as the years went on, I'd dream he was my Father—and the door gradually closed for me on that room where I thought I might someday find Father again, reading the *Saturday Evening Post*, or with his shoes off and his feet propped on his roll-top desk, doing the *Times* cross-word puzzle. But not for Mother. She lived without enthusiasm until I didn't need her anymore.

Maybe I was twelve, and maybe it was 1944, when Uncle Clarence took me to the Barrens. How could I remember when it was only a mile for us to go on Thule Drive? In a panic that surged like the very leaves, I felt I must remember all, before Uncle Clarence was gone forever beyond the reach of his body in air. In

that moment I seemed to have lost the knowledge of my years, and I could remember only his eyes again—but his face. . . ? Maybe in the Volkswagen. . . , and I jerked around. But it was just a red object partially seen beyond the children and the long backward stretch of Thule Drive.

I felt myself gasping again; the space in the car was thick with the tides of an alien place that smothered air.

"Don't, my dear," Wallace was saying. "Please. . . ."

"He never spoke of himself, Wallace. And he didn't expect anyone to ask. He was nothing . . . nobody. . . . All those years of bookkeeping, inventories, accounts Never his own, always someone else's I went through his things to find him a suit. You won't believe it—there was nothing, practically nothing: a tie clip, some cufflinks, a chipped amethyst ring"

"But I do believe."

"Then clap your hands," I said, but not out loud (I do not think, out loud); "clap your hands."

It was that trip to the Barrens that made my life, but who would have thought it? We were turning at the gate of the Lower Burial Ground; the sun flared on the window like a huge marigold and I was out at the eyes—and his face came back to me. He was standing at the door that still had the star and the crossed-flags over its fanlight. He held his glasses in his hand.

"Hullo, my dear. Is your mother home?"

He did not walk in, though he was my Father's brother, but waited with his hands behind his back and his head pushed forward as though he were taking a strange step, until Mother came to the door.

"I though I'd take this young lady for a trip."

Mother didn't want to get rid of me, but she had a need to be alone. She wanted to stare out the window across the long back yards and summon Father with all her power. She was afraid his face would go, and his body—I knew it now, because Uncle Clarence was going the same way from me. She let me go with him, her hand lingering on my pinafore as she straightened it, and her voice almost like an echo of goodbyes she had said, before, when they were not final in my ears.

Uncle Clarence never pushed in the trolley, and no one ever gave place to him, so I had to stand too. I didn't mind—I hadn't traveled much after Father went overseas. On the ferry to Camden, as the river breeze raised that spoiled smell of the Delaware that pains me yet with memory, and brushed it away, I knew something was up, because his voice shook just a little and his hand on my arm was light and timid.

"I'm going to show you something. Not many people have seen what I'm going to show you, Fran."

I was only twelve. Whatever could have possessed him to think I would understand? But he was right. We took the train to Winslow Junction. It clattered through the pines, and the soft coal spotted us with soot by the open window as the little towns clicked past. The pines smelt of that place beyond thought that a child intuits and that is what defines her as a child. At Winslow Junction we bought pop and peanut butter crackers, and set off on a narrow wagon road through the trees with their cones in the sky. Uncle Clarence hadn't much to say. Around him there was always quiet. No one ever seemed to expect him to talk, or to care particularly if he did; but there was the kind of calm where he was that some small creatures have and grant to us if we do not press them. These are analogies that I dare to remember.

The great pines tucked us in shadow, and we walked through a fragrant and breathless tunnel. At a ruined forge we left the trail, and Uncle Clarence took my hand.

"Not far," he said; "not far." Then: "There!"

Perhaps he never talked to anyone about it. Why did he choose me? He was trembling, and I could feel it as his hand lighted on my shoulder. I was innocent enough to be grateful for the gift that he offered; it was a vision that has never left me, though I would never see it quite that way again.

I could not see the end of it, those pine trees scarce higher than my shoulder. For that's the way it was; suddenly there was sky where before the pines had mounted seventy-five feet to heaven. It was the sky I saw first, a blue concave window on creation, and under it the elfin trees—though we had labored up no hill, climbed no tower. There we were, half way between earth and sky, and I was bigger than a child ought to be, bigger than the trees, while a glossy green carpet winnowed with wondrous white flowers made another smaller forest at my feet.

"Uncle Clarence . . . what is it? Where are we . . .?"

His fingers brushed my shoulder: "The elfin forest, Fran." And then, in a fancy that told me more of him than anyone else could know: "It's grown down to you."

We sat by the glossy leaves and drank pop and ate the peanut butter crackers. "That little plant is called Broom Crowberry," Uncle Clarence said; and then, shyly: "Conrad's Corema, Fran."

He was not the kind of man that anyone turned to for knowledge—he was not expected to know. "It's the rarest shrub. Far away on Prince Edward Island, and maybe in Newfoundland—maybe one or two other places—it grows. But nowhere else is

there an elfin forest" Then he was quiet, as though embarrassed by such a show of learning.

"Why?"

He smiled just a little and spread his hands—and now I could see what he had in common with the man in the Volkswagen under the pork-pie hat. A pensiveness, a sadness, that the question—often and hopelessly repeated—leaves as its aftermath.

"WALLACE," I SAID, "that was what started it. That was the question, just there, with it right in front of me"

"What did you say?" Of course—how could he know? We were inside the gates, and the family plot was beyond the first stand of pines. *Pinus rigida* . . . full, and far from the pitch pine plains where the dwarf trees flourish in a kind of natural selection after centuries of burning. Uncle Clarence was inarticulate, and I have the knowledge. I am the botanist now (how inconceivable then; how intimidating later, to him); he was a child in the face of those mysteries. I have studied the mycorrhiza symbiosis that, I do believe, preserves *Corema conradii*. I doubt if my knowledge could be used to reconcile or awaken a child. And sometimes at the Bio Station in the Carolina Wetlands where I work with Wallace, I think of the question that is really an answer, and I long to ask it again in such company and as so sure a beginning.

At the turn of the road by the pines I saw the children's car only. It was silly, but I had hoped that the red Volkswagen might follow us in. It hadn't. It had merely used Uncle Clarence to get through the lights.

Denise, Larry, and young Clarence were decently uncomfortable as the priest blessed the grave. I could not expect them to understand; on the few occasions they had met, Uncle Clarence had been kind to them, but withdrawn. Only Wallace had been back to the Pine Barrens with Uncle Clarence and me, and afterwards he had said, gently, that he felt himself an intruder. There are those things that even love cannot transmit.

The clouds blew over; more than birds fly winter. We dropped earth into the grave. On the way home to Grandmother we could not talk, but a fancy came to me: that I was a child again and could have my wish come true, and that I would wish the *Corema conradii* on Uncle Clarence's grave—the rarest shrub in the Barrens whose nearest station is far, far away on Prince Edward Island. I would plant it there, if I were twelve again, and call it by the common name that Uncle Clarence knew—Broom-Crowberry, Broom-Crowberry—and hear his shy correction, "Conrad's Corema, Fran." And I would never call it again by the name that

had taken me away from him.

When we came back to the apartment, Grandmother was upright in her chair: "Nikky," she said, "you must not grieve. You have that little girl to think of now . . ."

Manassas

PATRICK BIZZARO

*What are the cannons doing in the pasture?
That's where the first land battle of the Civil War took place.*

On summer nights when
local sons of great grandsons
feast on plump grapes
slung like thumbs to the fence,
you'll hear a cry across the valley.
You'll hear a woman picking wild berries
when she shouts for help and you'll think
of the child strapped to her back,
of mud worms tunneling the bloodlines
of her legs, of body tattoos
burnt for days to the earth.

You'll walk to the battle field
and turn logs and bales
of dry grass to their sides
until you find the marks
of her death where they
are surrounded by cannons,
where a child's tears
are so small they reach only
to the tops of your shoes.

The Taste of Rope

PATRICK BIZZARO

1.

In my photo album
a boy in cowboy hat,
spurs, and six-shooter,
sits on a horse's
swaying back.

Furrows, where a plowhorse
harness has worn maps,
tunnel the horse's sides.
Its wet flanks burst
against the boy's thighs.

Above the boy's wide
brim a cloud strains
against dry morning air.
Sun half shines.
Beneath his chest are the
horse's weathered nostrils.

2.

Driving through Fauquier Co., Va.
I note a horse head rock lying
decapitated from the
mountain. Its distant
eyes are deep-set,
drizzly. Its nostrils
are soundless and narrow.

From across the field that
separates mountain from
road, I hear the tug of harness

on a plowhorse, the grate
of ground beneath a plow.

The slow, glazed eye of a
plowhorse follows our car.
My son calls to me,
tells me the hag is a
pony. I hope my son
will never know
the taste of rope.

Virginia Summer

PATRICK BIZZARO

(for William Heyen)

The silk scarf stretches
tightly across your face,
held just long enough for
you to think you're dying

These are the days when
your bloodstream bursts
into your cheeks
and you run to the nearest pond
without care for the snakes
that move through undergrowth
like a child's birth.

This is the stillness
you remember. The silence
that sends you screaming
from your deepest dreams,
waking in the night
soaked in your own water.

The Bookmark

ANN JONES

***I**T WAS an old woman this time; yesterday it had been a sycamore; before that, a lake in the mountains, a child playing in the street, a red fox crossing a meadow, a young woman giving birth prematurely, a small island in a large river—and for me, the endless autopsy goes on. That is why I am writing this: because I am tiring. Not because I expect there to be survivors who will be dying (an apt word) to read it, but more as a bookmark for myself. What better way to mark your place than with your own words? It may speed things up a little next time, enabling me to skip a few of the beginning pages. If I am fortunate enough to find it. If I am fortunate enough to understand it if I find it. If I am fortunate.*

It is painful to consider how rarely consciousness collides with one of the key thoughts repeating themselves through aeons, never diminishing, never withdrawing, never ceasing to offer. There is a lesson here for impatient earthlings who, feeling their personal survival at stake, are always pressed for time, overshooting deadlines (that word again), working against the clicking of the cosmic clock they have installed in the foyer of their minds. It may be that we are simply not geared to understand time, for when we suddenly do, it is with an intensity that kills as often as it heals. And for those who survive the initial impact, futility on an unimaginable scale further thins the ranks. Futility, not fear; compassion, not the Arctic coldness of a distant observing race. Understanders are not different from you and me, they are you and me. And there is no one but ourselves to blame for what we have become, for we have created one another as surely as we have created our world. Yes, Student (who is myself), it is us, me and you, who are doing these terrible things to our selves, our families, our planet neighbors. I wish you had been with me when the old woman died. She was a perfect illustration of what I have been saying.

LACKING EVEN the simple grace to hide her boredom, Lottie yawned in her instructor's face. He tried, and failed, to hide his irritation, which made him doubly irritated, for tutoring was,

after all, his livelihood and his record couldn't absorb many more months like the last one when three of his best students had impatiently requested another instructor. They seemed to feel he was too slow, too repetitive, too secretive. They wanted to get immediately to the core of his knowledge with no time wasted on preliminaries.

"Do you really believe all that twaddle?" Lottie asked, nodding toward the copy of the old manuscript recovered many years ago from the remains of its ancient crypt.

"Yes, I do."

"Well, I don't. If it's true, it's stupid. The earth is still here. We're sitting on it. And the sky is up there, and the trees are over there, and us—we're still here. I submit that these proofs make the author's thesis invalid, and that we are wasting our time studying it."

She fell silent, thinking. And then, as though suddenly realizing the potential of what she had just said, burst out laughing. "That's it, isn't it? That's it! It's all a teacher's gimmick! You probably wrote that damn dull thing yourself, and have been waiting and waiting for me to find you out."

"Wrong again," he said softly. "It's real. It's more real than the world you think you live in." He picked up the manuscript, holding it close to his body as though he could absorb through his skin, the knowledge it contained.

Lottie's round face, darkened by the falling shadow of a plum tree, reminded him of an eclipsing moon. Soon it would be out of sight. Soon it would be beyond his power to reach. Reluctantly, he put the manuscript on the grass beside him, and got on about his business. "Any more questions before we go on?"

"Yes. Who wrote it? We don't even know if it was a man or a woman."

"Does it matter?" he asked, looking into her sullen eyes.

"It does to me." She pulled her long dark hair forward over her shoulder, and began braiding it as though preparing for bed.

The thought disturbed Mark. There was always the chance that she was a System-Spy, and if there was one thing he hated, it was being pitted against a female, as if no other adversary had enough drawing power to fill the arena. Not that he objected to a little sexual "pitting" now and then; it relieved the boredom. But he was getting older, more vulnerable as well as more experienced, and the hurtful, manipulative quality of these encounters no longer appealed to him. In fact, he was bored by them. And growing impotent because of them. He yawned nervously.

Lottie reached across his leg and picked up a few tiny yellow

flowers which she wove into her braid. "You don't like your work, do you?" she asked, offhandedly.

He returned her forthright look. Her eyes were set too close together, her straight white teeth protruded slightly, the top of her nose was coated with a sun-screening film of white cream. She was almost nude in short shorts and tiny halter that barely covered the nipples of her small breasts. She was, in other words, not beautiful, only, for even the most imperfect male-suspect, utterly approachable, a quality that raised her spy value to the limit.

He had seen them all. He had come and gone with the lot of them, but oh, Lottie, Lottie—briefly, he wondered what norm such a first-rank operator could be testing, and even so, felt himself being drawn back into the game which was only a game after all, and safe enough to play if you followed the rules. He reached for her hand, recalling just in time the last encounter: the sweet groping spoiled by the manipulative touch; the sudden loss of his power. He picked up his book instead.

She looked at him shrewdly, sadly, hurtfully, asking, without words. Why should I pay for another's mistake?

"To continue the lesson," he said, flipping the manuscript open to the place held by the bookmark, and beginning to read:

I AM FINDING it untenable, this rushing to the bedside of the dying, this macabre, though necessary prying, the long reports to be translated into a jargon that is bound to fall into disuse. But what can I do? The old woman's body was like a fragile old home, still graceful, still beautiful, still echoing with the sweet life it once contained. I could not walk away from her, although, from what I could tell, there was not a sign of life. I moved closer, noticing finally a flutter of movement in what, for the sake of the Student (who is myself), I shall refer to hereinafter as "the attic." It was enough to set the blood drumming in my veins, to make my heart pound. Often near the end, they move into the upper reaches of their homes, only to be trapped in the realm of dreams. Without another thought, I hurried up to the porch and walked cautiously across the front door which had fallen off its hinges and was lying in my path. While stepping across the oval window, my toe accidentally touched the doorbell which gave off a sad little whine and, immediately, I was gripped, in spite of my training, by an intense emotion which almost overwhelmed me. It was as if I had been required to do an autopsy on a member of my own family. Not that the woman I was examining was dead; she was not; neither was she part of me. And yet, and yet—

I forced myself forward, searching carefully through each of the empty lower rooms, having learned long ago, that no room is to be overlooked no matter how empty it appears, for the echoes and shadows in an old building can be very deceptive, and you certainly cannot tell by cursory glimpses exactly where the occupant is residing. She may be in the attic, and often is, as I have stated, but she could have gotten up in the middle of a dream, and wandered across to the nursery, or gone down to the parlor, or the kitchen, or even into the lean-to in the back of the house where the laundering is done. Yes, I found one there once. Sitting in the doorway through which she never would have walked on her own, and gazing out into the apple orchard in the moonlight. And I still have nightmares, thinking how easily I might have missed her.

But I find nothing in the lower rooms this time, although I am granted the scare of a lifetime when the floor of the back bedroom off the kitchen gives way suddenly, plunging me into a cellar, a dark drop of ten or twelve feet which jarred me to the bone. I had a moment of complete panic down there while making my way through the piles of broken jars: the ginger peaches, the stewed tomatoes, the summer pickles. Old homes are notoriously unreliable; they might collapse at any moment pinning you in the wreckage, out of which you may or may not be able to dig yourself. But worse than that, is the life they will take with them, the life you didn't save because of your incompetency, or poor judgment, or simple bad luck.

Normally, I do not consider the fact that I might be too late, for depression weakens, and I need my faculties in full strength, extended to their limit, if I am, not only to survive, but to succour.

Normally—but this did not seem to be a normal day for me. I found myself malingering after the fall into the cellar. At one time this was such a beautiful home, such a gracious, charming place to live. The structure was like a poem, delicate, yet strong, with just enough dark corners for contrast. The details were perfect: the gingerbread tracery ornamenting the outside, the gentle bulge of the bay windows, once filled, I was sure, with light and flowers, the tiny recessed porches off the upper story bedrooms, the piano in the parlor, the guitar on the wall. It must have been wonderful to spend a lifetime there. I felt an acute nostalgia for a past that has ended, and then a flash of anger brought me to my senses. Will I never learn? Must I continually be thrust back into Basics? What has the past to do with me? Nothing! Nothing!

Just then, I heard the thin wail of a frightened child coming from upstairs in one of the still-to-be searched rooms and, simultaneously, plaster fell from the parlor ceiling, striking the piano which sent discordant tones throughout the house. Guiltily, I

plunged ahead, racing through rooms cluttered with the corrupting beauty of security-objects, stumbling, falling, somehow managing to see everything at once, know everything at once, be everything at once.

And thank God that I did, for this time it was a beautiful, fragile, thin-skinned child, looking utterly bewildered, feeling utterly abandoned, and frightened out of her wits. I approached her slowly, not wanting to be the cause of further alarm; I moved no faster than the sunlight sliding through the dim window pane, although I could hear the dining room chandelier crashing to the floor, and feel the entire house list slightly to the west.

Student (who is myself), relax. This will take only a few more moments of your time. The sunlight and I touched the child at the same instant. She stopped screaming. Her winsome face was solemn, but she let me take her in my arms, and hold her against my stranger-body. I pressed her little face against my shoulder, and ran down the crumbling stairs, pushed my way through the shifting space of the lower rooms, raced across the porch and down the steps just as the entire structure collapsed, sending clouds of dust, splintered boards and broken glass in every direction.

The little girl began to sob and, to distract her from the distress of dissolution, the panic of disintegration, I moved out where she could see thunderheads racing across the sky, and sang: "Sweet little baby, don't you cry—"

It is painful to go over painful facts, but I must impress upon you, Student (who is myself), that happiness does not carry a no pain guarantee. This is a fact to remember. But the main fact, which I hope my story illustrates, is that, when your time of need comes, take responsibility for yourself. Don't expect someone else to do it for you. Use your common sense. Scream. Shout. Cry out for help as loud as you can. And keep it up. Don't ever stop. The searchers need your signal and, while it is true they are always closer than you think, it is not wise to make it more difficult for them. This is a paraphrase of Rule Number One. I have tried to state it as simply and unemotionally as possible. However, as I am comparatively new to this game, my control may not be complete at all times, and I can only hope that I have succeeded in keeping the lines of communication reasonably clear and comprehensible. The rest is up to you. I have done my part. For now.

"WELL," LOTTIE SAID, disrupting the embalming serenity in which he was immersed. "You certainly didn't write that book. It had to be a woman."

Surprised once again by her talent for living on the plane of the present, Mark was barely able to keep his annoyance to himself. She

did it so easily, as if there were nothing to it, as if half the world weren't suffering from atrophy of that same faculty. More than ever, he sensed that what he had always needed was a woman who was not an appendage of a system, or a parent, or a lover, or a tutor, but a woman appended only to herself, neither inclined, if it came to that, nor disinclined to spyhood. But, at the same time, he knew the limits of his own strength, the failures of his will. She had come too late. Oh, Lottie, he thought, my sweet assassinator—

"Don't you agree that she was a woman?" Lottie persisted.

"Certainly not. I don't agree to any such thing."

"But it's so obvious. Name me one man who would have the compassion and love for the dying old woman. Just one, Mark. And be honest."

He bit his lip. That is simplistic, he wanted to say, but hesitated, remembering how often in the past he had confused simplistic statement with simplicity, and what confrontations had then been forced upon him. The truth was that he was too old to go on teaching. He was too tired, too confused, too prone to mistake. Was that why she was here, he wondered? To put an end to his fumbling? But how? When? He stared at her, suffering the intense pressure generated by her presence.

She got to her feet. "I didn't think you could," she said. "But it doesn't matter, because I know what that woman meant, and so do you if you would only admit it. Look, I'll show you how to do what she said to do. You just open your mouth, and yell: Help! Help!"

"Oh, stop it," Mark said. "Stop making all that noise. Do you want the campus police on our necks? There isn't anyone here but you and me. There's no one else."

"Maybe that's enough."

"Dear little Lottie," he said tiredly, watching the clouds behind her head turn pink with alpenglow. "You're taking this all too literally." Reaching for her hand, he pulled her down beside him and began to recite: "Books are written to stimulate thought, to force us to hope, or not to hope. They are manipulators of consciousness, but we must not forget that we are individually free to accept or reject, to modify, or retain any part of them. The trouble is that sometimes we allow them too much power over us—"

"Like now?"

"I don't know, Lottie, I don't know. I am not a teacher of advanced theory," he said, putting his hands over his ears. "But please stop shouting for help. You're driving me crazy."

"I'm not shouting. I'm not asking for anything."

"Help doesn't come that easily, no matter what the manuscript says," Mark went on, as though she hadn't spoken.

"Oh, yes it does," she said, taking his hands down from his ears. "It just takes time for the searchers to find us. She said so, Mark. Don't you believe what you read?"

Leaning forward, she forced him to accept the imperative vision of her weapon-eyes: the unimaginative structure built without thought upon the flood plain, ravaged by occasional high water, scoured by sand, its interior a gutted, unexplored maze. Nothing was saved here, nothing was examined. Its occupant stood in an empty bedroom looking out the window, the gravity of the surrounding rooms a physical force pulling at his limbs, distorting his face, inverting his primitive attempts at thought. He gripped the sill, hypnotized by pine trees on the mountain top silhouetted by the rising moon. And still he could not push himself erect, force himself to venture out into the space he feared more than he feared his own death. It was too late. The largest pine turned dark against the flaring moon surface. The roar of flash-flood filled the night. It was too late.

"Help!" Mark shouted. "Help! Help!"

Gravity

JOSEPH GARRISON

When we take time to make our
place in a place, a thought
takes hold, rooted deeper
than honeysuckle or trees
and more secure than houses.
We no longer move in straight
lines, going from door to door,
hand to hand. There is no need
to be anywhere, where we are.
We learn to grow like grass
or timothy, seeding in season.
We take off our skins, tell
time by heart, learn to bear
down over the solid center
of the place that finds us.

The Tomb of Edgar Poe

BERNARD WELT

It was a peaceful season—the weather was mild
And the skies were clear—we called it
The Summer of Stars. In France we dream
Such summer nights away beneath the hemlock
And the yew, entranced by songs of insects
In the still air and by the stars in heaven,
As smiling cadavers approach from the woods,
Whispering distinctly in each ear, *Jamais plus*.

Day breaks, like a matchstick, and the morning
Sun discovers us lost on the wide sea, doing
A decent imitation of sailors, though we have no
Ship. If we had a ship, we could sail it;
If we had a destination, we could reach it. Here
At the world's center, a move in any direction
Is a descent, into the black water, black
Like the lightning that strikes on all sides of us;
And we look up, which is down, with startled
French expressions, into a calm block fashioned
Of grief, a perfect, monstrous, black machine.

Then it is evening again and we are in the place
You call "Baltimore," yes? and it is dark—
Everything occult now must remain occult,
An analysis is intervention, and knowledge
Dilution, and poetry is distillation. There is trouble
Here in Paradise: Americans, I love your country,
But I hate what you have done with it,
Crazily mummifying everything that lives
And is beautiful, digging up the earth to make
Memorials to it, filling it up with tortured poets
And their child brides and their graves. We
Who have come here to live among you
Ask you to pause sometimes to regard your
Fruited plains, to listen to your placid hills
And great lakes as they ask simple questions, the answers
To be found in the pages of *The Past Recaptured*,
Novel by M. Proust, French writer, dead.

The Gardener

CLAUDE KOCH

(in memory of Raffaele Casale, 1881-1974)

I

The venture in the garden early on
A bit too much, we try and try again:
Not Adam, smooth of limb and splendidly
Naked as the truth denied to him,

But by such surrogates as teeter, frail
As pipes of Pan and shadows by the wall,
Patched at the elbows, overshoe and small,
Whose sweetness lulls the angel and his flail.

So Raffaele, laboring through the fall,
By angel trumpet and by angel drum,
Datura cornucopia, and dill,
Like any ancient of the earth prepared

For the Lord God to walk in the afternoon air
Under the mimosa in Chestnut Hill.
It took no prophet drunk on *Genesis*
To sound the trump that waited on him there:

Patient for that anticipated call,
His fall was real not metaphorical.

II

All natural patience such as Autumn bears
To ripen and to take wears thin. For flesh
He had too many questions; and his heirs,
Inheriting the sun and moon, would hush

Their plaint to one lament: "Pop thought too much."
He kept his council and his innocence,
The natural man who could not leave alone
The quest begun in Eden, moving west,

And following in course the leveling sun
Until the bones made clamor and the flesh
Perversely circumscribed his every wish.
A kind of wisdom then that orchards share

With Winter's low horizon he put on.
The fruitful tree of knowledge bent to him;
Assembled at the gate the cherubim
Whose flaming swords proscribed a lexicon

The Lord in largesse named as his estate.
The Word alone is spoke beyond the gate.

III

The firethorne held him, as appropriate,
For did not Yahweh in another clime
(A Voice remanding from a flaming bush)
Invite deliverance to the spacious land

Of Hethite, Hevite, and of Amorrhite?
Enough that when we stretched a hand to him
His eyes were wondered with a second sight,
From garden into garden out of mind.

From quince and fig and grape, from mint and lime,
The years closed in upon him with a rush:
Shocked with the fearsome vision of old time,
The gardener rising from the burning bush

Dismissed us with a pensive charity.
It is the Garden solitude again
And there the great and there the little light,
And we but dreams dreamed in Jehovah's might;

He has returned to genesis and Life —
The Tree beneath Whose shade he takes his ease.

Homecoming

JEAN LEAVITT

You step out from the edge of the plane
Flying a greeting with the family flag—
A yellow kerchief extended
After five years
And so many ends untied.
Mother, I'm still not your silver bride.
I've been reaching up
Like a green shoot underground.
You questioned with a closed face
What I tried to mean
My unfoldings buried now.

When I see you, perched sparrow
By that huge white bird
I know I have grown
Past angry roots.
How can we count in fears
The measure and stretch
Of countries, skin, years?

Mother, I have separated us
Bone for bone.
Now as I greet you,
I am the one
Who is coming home.

Fox

JOHN GILGUN

YOU'RE ABSOLUTELY RIGHT, of course. No fox would ever venture out at night without his mask and his magic talisman. That would be to invite disaster. Fox law states unequivocally, "No mask, no talisman, no night journey." This is my mask; this is my talisman. I'll let you examine them in more detail in a moment. But first, you're a goose, aren't you? Your letter from the newspaper made no mention of that fact. I admit, I'm surprised. No, astonished! Tell me, doesn't it frighten you—given the reputation of foxes, I mean—finding yourself alone and unprotected in a fox's den? It doesn't? Oh. By the way, would you like a glass of California Pinot Chardonnay? It's quite good, really. Oh, you don't drink? Well, perhaps some mineral water then? I always have a glass or two of good wine before dinner. It clears the palate as it whets the appetite. The cleansing effect of this particular wine is extraordinary and it has a delicate piquancy which is absolutely divine. And while I'm on the subject of excellence in wine, let me add something about excellence in women. You are the most attractive female goose I've seen in years, my dear. Yes, you are. Now that self-deprecating modesty will get you nowhere here. Your qualities illuminate the room. And I especially admire your courage—maintaining your calm demeanor in the presence of a fox who has the reputation of being—how can I put it? Oh, more than a little experienced with women. Hmm? And your concern for your newspaper is certainly commendable. Of course I'll help you in any way I can. I was honestly touched by the last sentence of your letter. "A newspaper stands or falls by the accuracy of its reporting." So you came directly to the source. You took the risk. Ah, that every reporter possessed that kind of courage! You have nerves of steel, my dear, a quality rare in any creature, but especially rare in a female goose.

I published a newspaper myself before I went into politics, you know. You do know? Ah, you've done research on me, of course. And now that I'm out of office, now that I'm no longer in politics, now that I've been so abruptly, so arbitrarily and so un-

fairly thrown out. . . ! But sit over here, please. The sofa is so much more comfortable. Try some of these canapes—avocado, a little lemon juice, pitted olives. Oh, you *are* a vegetarian! You see, I guessed. So many creatures are into that now. I suppose you meditate and do yoga, too? And jog every morning? A ferret ward heeler said once, "The sight of a goose jogging would make the angels weep!" But not a bit of it, my dear. Not a bit of it. Motion is beauty. Movement is grace. Any movement, any motion. But all this clean living! This sudden penchant for asceticism, for morality! It's always the same, isn't it? When you get a Reform Candidate in, moral uplift and self denial follow. As you know, it wasn't that way before the last election, before I was removed from office, along with my brothers. But, think about it! A Reformist who stuffs ballot boxes, who resorts to extortion, to intimidation . . . ! The irony of it make my teeth tingle! But why go into a rage? All in a day's work, as they say. Here, let me adjust the light so that it doesn't shine directly into your eyes. There, that's better, isn't it?

I'm sure you've heard the old saying, "Beware the fox who wears a smiling mask?" Well, as you can see from my mask, which has a grave almost sullen expression, there's nothing to fear from me. This is the mask for lawyers, counselors, administrators and, as the old saying puts it, "The fox whose lips have brushed the ear of the king." This mask was owned originally by William Cecil, the first Baron Burghley, adviser to Queen Elizabeth the First. It's been in my family since 1598. As the eldest son, I inherited it when I reached my majority in . . . But you already know when I came of age, don't you, Greta? It is "Greta," isn't it? Yes, you have that air of mystery about you, that Garbo quality. The line of your throat—so pure, so white!—when you throw your head back and laugh like that, is so very exciting. Your parents named you wisely. Often, when they name us, our parents surprise us with their insights. They seem to see so deeply into our inner natures. My name—Sardonicus—was given to me because I emerged from the womb wearing a crooked grin. My middle name, Russel, refers to the redness of my coat. Observe how your webbed foot shows up against my rich, blood-red fur—black against red, as with playing cards. Do you see any mystical significance in the colors? Oh, you aren't into the mysticism of color yet. A pity. But perhaps it will come to you later. Foxes have always been active in religious organizations, you know. Many Roman Catholic cardinals have been reincarnated as foxes. And you are probably not aware of this, but the souls of Niccolo Machiavelli, Sir Walter Raleigh and Benjamin Disraeli passed

immediately into the bodies of foxes as soon as they expired. Each time the soul of a famous person passes into the body of a fox, we foxes are rewarded in a special way, though I can't tell you how, since all foxes take a sacred oath never to reveal that. We almost finessed the soul of the poet Rimbaud, but it finally went into the body of a Malaysian civet cat instead. If Rimbaud had died at sixteen, we'd have had him, for at the age of sixteen Rimbaud was pure fox. We've lost several poets to the cat family—Poe, Baudelaire, Villon. I have never understood why this should be so.

HERE, HOLD MY MASK in your wing, Greta. Now you are probably the only goose in history to hold a fox's mask in her lily-white wing. Nervous? No? Calm as can be! Oh, Greta, what a treasure you are! But observe the construction of the mask. As you can see, it's made from strips of laminated wood—tradition says, English walnut—reinforced on the inside with gutta-percha. The gutta-percha was added during the 19th Century, about the time of the Franco-Prussian War. The lower part of the mask is hinged; so that the mouth can open and close. The hinge must be oiled on our High Holy Days. I cannot reveal to you the ingredients of the oil we use, sorry. I told you that this was the mask of foxes who give counsel to kings, so I need not belabor the rather obvious symbolism of the moving mouth. Notice the intricate little steel spring between the eyelids. The eyes move from side to side, very slyly, as the lids go up and down. Listen to the “ping” the spring makes when I release it—pure music, pure poetry, designed to charm the ear of anyone who happens to be in power at the moment. Richelieu put himself to sleep every night of his life thinking of the “ping” in this little steel spring. It has such a soothing sound, doesn't it? A hypnotic quality! Lean closer, little goose. You're missing the full effect of it. *Ping!* He, he! *Ping, ping!* It's so good to hear you laugh, to know you're loosening up a bit! And why not? I'm not your editor, you know. I'm not going to give you a dressing-down for failing to get a story in on time. Ah, but the mask, the mask! This reddish color is cochineal, a scarlet dye made from the bodies of certain South American insects. Only the female of the species can give us this dye and over a million of them were sacrificed for this one mask alone. The color signifies “fox.” Baron Burghley had a red face, which his enemies attributed to drink or venereal disease, but it was simply the “fox” showing through. As they say, “In the flushed face, the fox we trace.” The odor—that musky, penetrating, bone-chilling odor? That is incense, the incense used in all our ceremonies—initiation, marriage, funeral. What you're sniffing there so delicately, so

fastidiously, is four hundred years of ritual, blood ritual, sperm ritual, moon ritual. That's potent magic—the smell of death and rebirth, lust, copulation, gestation, murder, sacrifice. Heady stuff! That's why your beak is quivering now. That's why your feathers are ever-so-slightly ruffled. You geese have no equivalent of this. What! You say that Force that drives you across the sky during your migrations? Did I hear you correctly? You must be joking. Your magic is white magic, the magic of clouds, of air, of thin reeds singing on banksides, of sunlight warming the delicate casings of the eggs in your ephemeral nests. Our magic is dark red, the magic of blood—heavy, deep, timeless, like a pool at the very bottom of a cave. Your magic is a daytime magic and you tremble in terror when it deserts you immediately after sunset. But our magic is the magic of four A.M., of the hunt, the kill! Our magic involves the ecstasy of yellow eye, ravening tooth, the hot dry rage in the back of the throat as we leap forward out of our cover for the kill!

Ah, but I'm getting carried away. Greta, you are even more attractive when you blanch, did you know that? The purity of your whiteness! You have a soul of purest snow—so unlike my own, I'm afraid, which has been soiled by so many sins. We are opposites, little one, and opposites attract. It's fate, our coming together like this. If I turn my head away, forgive me, it's because, given my canine nature, I can't help seeing your cloud-white feathers streaked with blood. I can't help it. I was born this way. I'm pure fox, after all. Oh, yes, the mask! Well, the hairs around the lips are from Raleigh's beard. They appeared on the face of the mask a second after he was beheaded in 1618. The mask weighs four pounds. Each eye socket is two and a half inches in diameter. From crown to chin, the mask measures nine inches exactly. The teeth—are real.

That noise you hear? It's the steel door opening into the inner chamber. My brothers are coming in for supper. I'd like you to meet them. As you can see, they are the cream of the fox line. Cornelius, Gonzalo, Rex, Simonides, Alexas, Saturninus, Alcibiades—I'd like you to meet Greta, who's here to do an in-depth interview with us for the paper. What do you think of my brothers' Renaissance costumes, Greta? For a fox, it is always the High Renaissance, century after century. Have you ever seen more gorgeous ruffs, jerkins, peascod doublets? Yes, they reek! They reek wonderfully! And, yes, their capes are streaked with blood! Magnificent! How they do bring in the fear that rides on the cold evening air!

HAS IT BEEN accomplished then, my brothers? Is what I read in your eyes correct? Yes, yes? Well, Greta, I'll give you the news before your paper prints it. Your Reformist has been—how can I put this, he, he!—removed from office, permanently. I feel like doing a little dance now! We've won, we've won! Clasp hands, my brothers! Our candidate, that whippet, that faggot whippet whom we can control, will replace that hypocritical, overbearing, self righteous. . .! Is he really dead? This puts an even finer edge on what was already a wonderful evening.

You see, Greta, political parties exist to perpetuate political games. Reform movements, elections, laws—all window dressing! Speaking of dressing! But no, even *I* couldn't be that indelicate. You say you want to examine the talismans? All right, I see no reason why I can't oblige you. As your keen eye has detected, each of my brothers is wearing his talisman around his neck. When I give the signal, each will demonstrate his talisman for you. Each talisman is made of carved bone and each is in the shape of a phallus. The glans penis is made of ebony, a wood sacred to the spirits of the night. Notice the contrast between the white of the polished bone and the ebony. This symbolizes life and death. Life grows out of death and death follows life. Spirit grows out of flesh, as the confused aspirations of the soul grow out of the absolute certainties of blood and sperm. So now, my brothers, push the buttons at the base of your talismans revealing—why, seven knives, my dear! *Knives!* Of course. What did you expect, marshmallows? And that sound you hear coming from the kitchen—the clashing of cutlery, the rattling of a roasting pan! What did you expect to hear in a fox's den at suppertime? Someone playing Chopin, reciting the poetry of Ella Wheeler Wilcox, dancing the gavotte? Come come, sweetheart, you wanted this. You wouldn't have come here if you hadn't wanted this. You know and I know that this was all predicated in the vapid sexual passions of your dimwitted parents, in the egg which housed you, in the illusions which nourished and sustained you through your protected childhood, in the insipid prayers you offered up to your gods of water and mist and swamp grass. Call on them now! See how much good it will do you. Oh, don't flutter that way, Greta, my love. It excites us so. Have pity on our poor throbbing glands. Listen, I was aware of your latent death-wish as soon as you stepped over the threshold. Rex, what does the Sacred Book tell us to do about death wishes? Why, satisfy them, of course! But think of it this way, Greta. You are about to participate in a ceremony ordained by the Creator Himself—the ritual rape, murder and dismemberment of a foolish goose by a

group of foxes following the earliest of His commands, that is, "Thou shalt honor thy instincts above all else, for they came first as the foundation for all things." By the way, Saturninus, do try some of that Pinot Chardonnay. It's really excellent. Greta, Greta, I'm bending close not to bite you, though that will come in time, but to offer you some words of wisdom and perhaps also of consolation. It's a quotation from Holderlin. "Where danger is, there is salvation also." You have seen your salvation. We are here before you. Now give me your throat. A kiss, yes, a mere kiss! We're in no hurry. It has been pre-ordained that this ceremony will not end until sunrise.

Are you ready, O my brothers?

A Confused Lazarus

GREGORY KLOSKO

I am like Lazarus, back from the dead,
Back from the shade's glimpse of Eternal Light
Seen through a constant quiet Dark, and instead,
Back to the pulsing world of day and night.
I am returned to the slash of the flower,
The violent sun, the wood's splintered grain,
All the intricate limits of the hour,
The countless small indignities of the rain.

For you must be the God of Love to me,
Lead me from Death's maze on a golden tether,
Though your love and my peace cannot agree,
Or your world be what my world used to be.
For now it seems a wide plain in wild weather
Where Love and Life, the fool, stumble together.

The Last Will and Testament of Aunt Rose

GERALDINE SCHMITZ

SIS LOOKED AROUND apprehensively. "Please God, don't allow Mother to be here, waiting for us. We purposely didn't give her any information, not the flight number, the time of arrival, not even the airline, only that we would arrive sometime this afternoon. Remember, God, that Mother is now eighty years old." That was her prayer as they stepped from the tram into the cool air and space of Tampa International Airport.

They rode the escalator to the lower level, picked up their luggage and headed for Avis Rent-A-Car. The car they got was a Chevy Vega. All they had, the clerk said. She had visions of how they would arrange Mother in the car; not in the back, awkward and clumsy; it would have to be in the front, awkward and clumsy, but easier.

The Vega was bright red and it was burning hot from the sun. They kept the two doors open while Bill tried to fit the key to the ignition. "Shit!" he said. She turned her head and examined the other cars in the lot. Well, it was better than "Jesus Christ!" That's what he had snarled two years ago in the same situation but in another parking lot. Then it was April and the Ford from Hertz had been parked in the shade. And Mother was sitting in the back with her chin tilted very high.

Now, in June, Bill was testing the steering, the directionals, the brakes, the windshield wipers. He said the brakes were not very good, and Sis did notice that as they drove across the Causeway and into Clearwater, so she reminded him of red lights ahead, two blocks before each one. She was relieved that Mother was not in the car, back or front, and that the air-conditioning was pumping cool blasts from somewhere beneath the dashboard.

"So, you finally got here." Mother always says that. "Sis, you sit down. Bill, how about a cold drink? No? A beer then," she con-

tinued. "Now, let's see. I have everything. I'm all ready." Mother did her mincing little walk, sort of a strut really, as she went into the kitchen, like a small girl showing off a new pinafore.

Sis glanced around the two rooms. Framed photographs, magazines, torn letters, in and out of rag-edged envelopes, and tiny ceramic figurines, were all cluttered together on the two low coffee tables and on the end tables at both sides of the sofa. A screen in one corner masked a jumble of essentials, folding cot, sewing machine, an old radio, more pictures, some clothes and shoes. A big old table dominated the kitchen, and on it, permanently, sat the telephone and a battered old portable typewriter, arrogant among the kitchen utensils that surrounded them.

"Now Sis, why did you go to a motel? You know I wanted you to stay here." Mother set down two glasses of orange juice on the edge of the coffee table. The room was hot. They drank the juice and licked the ice.

"Because it's too much work for you when we stay here, Mother. You know that." Sis remembered the week of sultry days and long sleepless nights when they had had the two rooms upstairs to themselves; the small ineffectual air conditioner that purred through the night; the dingy bathroom, dark even with the light on, and the leggy insects that, thank God, she had never seen because Bill made sure to squash them all before she had to go in there. More vivid than the invisible bugs, less tangible and more disturbing because she couldn't picture it, was the talk, the endless talk into the night, savage and mean. About the faithless husband who would not leave her until she resorted to the law to make him go; about the son, her dead son whose words were remembered, "When is this all going to end, Mom?"; about the brothers and the sisters, and about Rose, the last survivor of them except for Mother.

"It was a shock—about Rose, I mean." Mother's voice was lower now, more intimate. "But why do they have to do everything so quick—in such a hurry—the funeral tomorrow!" Her reproachful tone was for Bill. He was the one who had received the telephone call from the funeral director in Dunedin, the one who was pressured to make some immediate decisions because they were unable to reach Mother. And that was yesterday.

"I was out, of course. I go out every day. See this skirt? Only a dollar. I know where to shop. I know the value of a dollar. Rose never did. Mom spoiled her. Right from the beginning."

SIS THOUGHT about Aunt Rose. Rose had tried to teach a four year old the Black-Bottom and the Charleston; was for-

ever clowning before someone's camera, needing only a whisk broom, a strainer, some bologna skins for props. She was religious too, never stopped telling you how holy she was. And when she drank she was very nasty. Liquor spilled over her tongue and stimulated the dark thoughts that slumbered in her head waiting for the black magic to set them spinning. There was the marriage with all the fixings, which she would have even without the money to pay for it; the born dead baby; the desertion; the Mexican divorce; and when it was all over, "He wasn't so bad, Sis." And then the affairs, all ending hurtfully for her, but with an accolade for each of the men who had used her, "A wonderful man, Sis, I pray for him every night." She was a black and orange butterfly, wings clipped, flittering, fluttering, and always praying.

But it was Mother who followed Rose to Florida, complaining bitterly that Rose was a fool to quit her job and try to live on only one check a month. Mother wanted Rose to live with her, but there would be no television, no liquor, no men, all that Rose craved. So Rose stayed in her mobile home in Dunedin, with her television, an occasional beer, and a parakeet that she loved because a man had given it to her. Mother hated the parakeet.

"They're saying the Rosary at seven," Mother continued. The limousine will pick us up. I told them to put it on the bill." The phone rang and Mother went to the kitchen table to answer it. "Yes, yes—I know—yes, my daughter is here. One moment."

Aunt Rose had left a will. They were to meet with her lawyer the day after the funeral. Sis wondered about this in the limousine. She was sure that Rose's tangible assets could only consist of an insurance policy, a monthly Social Security check, and possibly a bank account of five hundred dollars. She remembered how proud Rose was when the plush New York hotel where she worked as a telephone operator gave her the five hundred dollars as a retirement gift. It was more money than Rose had ever had and she told Sis that this was to be her "nest-egg" for the future.

Mother was still talking, about Rose, in the big black car, a stranger driving, a stranger who should never hear these miseries but was listening anyway. "He should have married her. The doctor told me that. But he was ugly. All those horrible veins in his legs—and the black stuff. Disgusting. And what did she get? Nothing."

"It doesn't matter now, Mother He died last year. It's all over."

"I don't care. It wasn't so long ago. I remember. I remember

everything. They met me at the train. Imagine! He was wearing shorts—with those awful looking legs. I took one look at him and I knew she wasn't going to change. Another fella! At her age! But he had a car. You know Rose, anyone with a car. I showed them though. I took a cab. I'm smart, I can take care of myself."

Sis was grateful for Bill's interruption with directions from the driver on how to get to the lawyer's office in Dunedin. This time they would know the way. When they visited Rose two years ago, Mother had refused to go with them, but said they could drop her off at the shopping mall. She told them, emphatically, that the bridge road would take them to Dunedin. It didn't. They had to go back and find the way themselves. Mother never mentioned it. Neither did they. Rose told them the story. About the kindness of her new friend and that Mother had treated him badly. "What's wrong with her, Sis?" Rose had asked.

Mother cried throughout the Rosary service, ten Hail Marys and Blessed Be God and His Angels and His Saints, ten times over. She cried during the funeral too, but quit briefly when the priest mentioned Aunt Rose's sins. These unidentified transgressions were expiated, the priest said, because of Aunt Rose's generosity of which only he, the priest, had knowledge. Mother cried.

AFTER THE FUNERAL they went directly to Aunt Rose's trailer. Park Lake Village they called it. It was a village of trailers, no park and no lake. Each trailer was suspended on its own neat plot, and all of the elderly renters had attempted to hide the dark empty space between trailer and earth by planting shrubs and flowers, no trees. Although in her letters she called it "Dullsville," Rose had tended her home lovingly, decorated it sparsely outside, precisely within, without mementos of the past. Anything that was precious to Aunt Rose had been given away, even what she had sworn to keep forever.

They were not prepared for the disarray within the trailer, newspapers and clothes strewn over the furniture and unopened packs of cigarettes on the floor, an empty red carton hanging stiffly from the corner of a table.

"The office gave me the key—no questions asked. That's how they do things in this place," Mother said.

"You mean you were here? Before we came?"

"Why, yes, I had to make sure everything was safe, you know. Her purse was right at the door. Can you imagine! Maybe the police put it there. I don't know." Mother walked around aimlessly, touching, pressing with the flat of her hand each piece of

furniture as she passed it. "She had more than two hundred dollars in it. Don't know how she managed that. Did you know she paid someone to come and clean this place? Hated housework. Always did. I take care of my own place, why couldn't she?" Mother touched the tightly bound and skinny white braids at the back of her head and at the same time looked in to the shrouded oval mirror on the wall. She saw only a ghostly image, one that she rejected immediately and turned away from it. "Isn't that ridiculous?" she questioned. "Covering the mirror so that the bird wouldn't hurt itself flying into it? I gave the parakeet to the old lady next door. She's very old. Said Rose wanted her to have it. Good riddance."

"Well, Mother, the important thing now is to find that insurance policy. We can't go to the lawyer's office without it." Sis was on her way into the bedroom, but the sight of the small rug next to the bed, rumpled and with a few dark bloodstains on it, turned her back into the living room. So it was Bill who found the insurance policy in the trunk on the other side of the bed. It was mixed with other papers in a very soft and wrinkled cellophane bag. "Let's get out of here," he said, and called the taxi number Rose had posted next to the telephone.

Back in the motel room Sis and Bill discussed the papers that were in the crinkled bag: the bank book, now totalling over six hundred dollars; telephone and electric bills, all stamped PAID; and rent receipts, on the backs of which were shopping lists, reminders, and some poignant notes that Rose had written to herself. They agreed that Sis should call Mother and prepare her for what was to come.

"Mother, we found a copy of the will. She left everything to the Church. We'll pick you up tomorrow at eleven-thirty. Okay?"

"Oh, sure. I'll be ready." No surprise, no uneven breathing, no hesitation.

"And don't forget the money—in Aunt Rose's pocketbook."

"I won't. Goodbye now."

Sis decided to cram everything back into the bag and let the lawyer sort it all out. Except one newspaper clipping. It was from the *Tampa Tribune* and it told the world that Mother had been relieved, fleeced, the article said, of one thousand dollars by two con women. It was a different story that Mother had told them, of abduction, brutality, and that she was the heroine in an action-packed thriller. Not that they had believed her story, but it was the only one they knew, until now. Sis contemplated a scene where Aunt Rose's attorney might confront Mother with this new and authentic version of the crime. He would slam the *Tampa Trib*

on a desk in front of her and demand the truth, and Mother would be crushed and humiliated. Sis shuddered, then grinned at this imaginary embarrassment. She put the news item in her wallet.

The lawyer turned out to be young, quite brash, and he squinted his eyes when he talked. He was apologetic about the meagerness of this poor woman's assets, and the valuable time that was being wasted on them. He read the will, counted the money, shuffled the papers, and then, peering at Mother earnestly, he told her that Aunt Rose had not deliberately left Mother out of her last will and testament, but felt that Mother was well provided for in many other ways.

"Yes," Mother said, "I have lots of money."

"You understand that all her possessions are to go to the St. Vincent De Paul Society of her parish. They will take care of everything. However, if there is anything you would particularly like to have . . .? Something of sentimental value . . .?" The young man paused; there was silence. Sis, Bill, and the lawyer stared at Mother. She turned her head to one side, away from them, and raised it so that her chin lifted and extended the muscles in her throat.

"Yes," she said, "I want the television."

She got it too. They know because Mother called long-distance to tell them. It stands, mute and unblinking, behind the screen in the corner, pressed against the folding cot, with the scratchy old radio on top of it.

Haiku

P. W. GRAY

Deaf ants feel footsteps.
The blind have compensations,
Too: let me touch you.

I do not need to see John Keenan to know him. The man has a grace. I have felt it long in letters, a charm latent in them, a kindness, but one which never let the friend at this end or the magazine on that end render its less than best. Secretly I was pleased when he rejected stories that were not up to what he demanded: that told me something, and I've felt the thanks of it. Many I shelved; they are still there. His range of character surely comes through in the range of his writing. His style shifts with his thought, but is ever clear, bears the mark of a light, a calm reason, no matter the deep feeling about the dilemmas he always pointed up. There was feeling distilled and crystallized. In the selections of *Four Quarters* (When have I not known the magazine?), I felt such a wholeness as is hard to come by. How does one come by such a whole mind? And he was interested in his contributors, us, not just in a story; and he remembered. How could I, when considering *Four Quarters*, not confuse it with the man?

M. M. Liberman is Oakes Ames Professor of English at Grinnell College in Iowa. Author of A Preface to Literary Analysis, The Practice of Criticism, and a critical study of Katherine Anne Porter's fiction, he has also published numerous short stories, some of which are collected in Maggot and Worm and Eight Other Stories:

My dealings with John Keenan in his capacity as editor of *Four Quarters* have always been gratifying because of a quality which has always come through from his end. For want of a more contemporary term I should call it gentlemanliness. He has always been prompt, candid, and good to his word. Whoever supposes that these qualities are common in the relationships between writers and editors has never tried to publish his own work. I can only suppose that the durability of *Four Quarters* has had something to do with this. Word gets around. No one can say of this magazine, "Better here than Philadelphia."

T. Alan Broughton of the University of Vermont has a book of

poems, In the Face of Descent, now in its third printing; his first novel, A Family Gathering, was described as "a tough, slender, heartbreaking book" in the New York Times Book Review:

They call them little magazines, but the only thing small about them is their circulation. Anyone who writes poetry or is an avid reader of it knows that these publications are the true giants. When I look back over the poems and stories that have appeared in *Four Quarters*, I see how close John Keenan's judgment is to mine; the work he has chosen has been work that seems to endure for me as well. Or is it that his acceptance has helped me to develop in those ways, so that what he liked is what I have nurtured and continued? As a reader, sometimes a subscriber, always as the proud recipient of a copy with one's own work, there is the happy and humbling experience of discovering that one is in excellent company. That, for me, has again and again been the true test of John's discernment. The past seven years have been important ones for my writing, and what small success I may have now has been greatly aided by John Keenan and *Four Quarters*.

The seven volumes of Four Quarters edited by John Keenan represent about twenty hours a week of work, fifty-two weeks a year, for seven years—nearly a year, day and night, of a man's life. The unpaid labor was literally for love: the love of literary craftsmanship and a belief that the human experience is best communicated in a finely made poem or story. We were lucky to have such a man for editor; we are fortunate now to have him for chairman. And when we return to read your seven volumes, John, we will find them (as Wordsworth prophesized about the woods and cliffs near Tintern Abbey), "More dear, both for themselves and for thy sake!"

—J.A.B.

Contributors

CLAUDE KOCH, professor of English and director of the creative writing program at La Salle, is currently at work on his fifth novel. PATRICK BIZZARO is the author of *Ohio Seduction* (Bartholomew's Cobble, 1976) and teaches at Northern Virginia Community College, where he edits *Manassas Review*. The University of Missouri Press has published a collection of stories by ANN JONES; this is her fourth appearance in *Four Quarters*. JOSEPH GARRISON has had many poems in small press publications. He teaches at Mary Baldwin College in Staunton, Virginia. A book by BERNARD WELT, *Wave* (Jawbone), appeared earlier this year; he will earn his Ph.D. from American University this summer. Readers of our last issue need no introduction to JEAN LEAVITT, who has studied with poet Ruth Stone and currently teaches at Philadelphia Community College. JOHN GILGUN, a professor at Missouri Western State, has published his "reincarnation fables" in several literary magazines; we wish him luck with his planned collected edition. A 1972 graduate of La Salle College, GREGORY KLOSKO has a master's degree from Ohio University and is now working on his doctorate at Temple University. GERALDINE SCHMITZ began writing stories about a year ago, after her retirement from twenty years as secretary to the village administrator of Lake Success, New York, and from two years as a legal secretary in Florida. We are pleased to publish her first story in this issue. P. W. GRAY is a frequent contributor; he serves as poet-in-the-schools in Omaha, Nebraska.

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